

Cornille, C (ed.) (2013). *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to inter-religious dialogue*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. ISBN 978-0-470-65520-7

A good deal of interreligious dialogue has been going on over the past few decades, both at a theoretical level in theology and religious studies and in practical interreligious dialogue. While different religions have been interacting for millennia, the editor notes that ‘the experience of genuine dialogue or constructive engagement ... is still in fact in its infancy’ (xvi). This *Companion* is designed as a broad introduction, not only to specific interreligious dialogues but to general research topics in the field.

The category of interreligious dialogue is understood as ‘any form or degree of constructive engagement between religions traditions’ (xii). It differs from religious studies, therefore, in that the partners interact from a confessional point of view. It differs from traditional apologetics also in that its focus is on learning from the dialogue partner. It therefore includes mutual respect and an openness to the possibility of learning, implying a humble epistemology and the possibility of truth in other religions. This fact – the pursuit rather than denial of truth - is a key to the constructiveness of such interreligious dialogue.

Part One of the *Companion* consists of eleven chapters on general topics of interreligious dialogue which ‘bring to the fore some of the areas which have been particularly relevant in the pursuit and performance of inter-religious dialogue, as well as some critical issues arising from that dialogue’ (xiv). Their themes are: ‘History of interreligious dialogue’ (Swidler), ‘Conditions for interreligious dialogue’ (Cornille), ‘Monastic interreligious dialogue’ (de Béthune), ‘Comparative theology and interreligious dialogue’ (Clooney), ‘Scriptural reasoning as interreligious dialogue’ (Moyaert), ‘Interreligious worship’ (Amaladoss), ‘Art and interreligious dialogue’ (Anderson), ‘Interreligious dialogue and interstitial theology’ (Ruparell), ‘Interreligious dialogue and social action’ (Knitter), ‘Interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding’ (Kadayifci-Orellana), and ‘Women in interreligious dialogue’ (Hill-Fletcher).

All these chapters are written by specialists - nearly half of them women, much to the editor’s credit. On the other hand, the vast majority (eight out of eleven) are Roman Catholics. These focal topics provide a valuable introduction to interreligious dialogue, relating as they do to the history and internal diversity of dialogue on the one hand and the interactions between interreligious dialogue and its socio-political context on the other.

We were surprised to find a chapter on art and interreligious dialogue, and puzzled by a chapter on what the author calls ‘interstitial theology’ (‘a model of dialogue which leverages syncretism for the purposes of continuing the conversation of religions’ (118)). These chapters show that the *Companion* is not just a *status quaestionis* of the established theory and practice of interreligious dialogue: it actually tries to contribute to its theoretical and practical development. In that respect a chapter on interreligious dialogue and communication theory might have been helpful.

Part Two presents seventeen cases studies: a rich tapestry of (mostly) bilateral interreligious dialogues. Ten of these deal with the five major world religions, but there are also articles on Confucian-Jewish and Christian-Confucian dialogues, on Shinto-Buddhist dialogue and - more surprisingly, perhaps – dialogues between Islam and African religions, between Native American spirituality and Christianity, about the implicit dialogue of Confucian Muslims, and finally about the Mormon-Evangelical dialogue.

These chapters illustrate the general philosophy of interreligious dialogue in the *Companion*, blending confessional identity with receptiveness by way of a humble epistemology. They are written not from a metaperspective that is supposedly neutral religiously, but from the perspective of one religion: even from a particular subtradition of that religion. The editor is well aware that the case studies would have been different if written by an author from a different religion, or even from a different tradition within the same religion. This is an obvious drawback. One of the case studies – the one about the Confucian-Jewish dialogue – is co-authored by a Jewish and a Confucian scholar. Perhaps the way forward for a *Companion to inter-religious dialogue* is to focus on jointly written case studies by authors who represent the traditions in question.

The Wiley-Blackwell *Companion* can be warmly commended to scholars interested in the theoretical state of the theology of interreligious dialogue or in updating their knowledge of any of the bilateral dialogues. (W. Biesbrouck, Leuven)